

Environmental Fact Sheet



August 2002

EPA Issues Draft Discharge Permits and Proposed Variances for Three Silver Valley Wastewater Treatment Plants

Public Comment Period and Public Hearing Scheduled

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is now accepting comments on three draft National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits for wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) in the Silver Valley in North Idaho. Two permits are for the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River Sewer District for discharges from the Page and Mullan WWTPs to the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River. The third permit is for the City of Smelterville for its discharge from the Smelterville WWTP to the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River.

NPDES permits are required under the Clean Water Act for all point sources discharging pollutants into waters of the United States. These permits update the facilities' existing wastewater permits.

Permits Contain Variances for Metals

All three permits would include proposed **five-year** variances from **achieving water quality** standards for cadmium, lead and zinc. Under the variances, the WWTPs will be required to keep the amount of metals discharged at or below their current levels and not increase the metals discharged. The WWTPs will also be required to fix cracks, leaks or other problems with their collections systems to reduce the amount of metals entering the systems. These steps should result in the plants discharging lower amounts of metals (more information on the variances is included on page 2). The permits will not require the WWTPs to install new treatment technologies to control metals.

The variances are proposed because EPA and the State of Idaho determined that if the facilities were required to meet water quality standards **now**, it would result in a substantial economic and social burden to the communities.

You Can Comment on the Draft Permits and Proposed Variances

Written comments will be accepted on the permits and proposed metals variances until October 15, 2002. A public hearing will be held on October 1, 2002, for the purpose of accepting oral comments on the permits and variances.

EPA will consider all comments before issuing the final permits and variances for metals. Comments on draft permits and variances should be addressed to: Office of Water Director, U.S. EPA, Region 10, 1200 Sixth Avenue, OW-130, Seattle, WA 98101.

In addition, EPA has scheduled a public hearing on **October 1, 2002**, beginning at 6:00 p.m. at the Silver Hills Middle School in Osburn, Idaho. A sign-in process will be used for people wishing to make a statement or submit written comments at the hearing.

Updated Permits Needed

Updating the NPDES permits to the Page, Mullan and Smelterville WWTPs is part of continuing efforts to reduce the amount of metals in the rivers and streams in the Silver Valley and to protect fish and other aquatic life throughout the Coeur d'Alene Basin.

The permits will each be reissued for a five-year period. Page's permit was last reissued in 1994 and expired in 1999. Mullan and Smelterville's permits were last reissued in 1985 and expired in 1990.

What do the Draft Permits Require?

The draft permits set conditions on the discharge of pollutants from each WWTP and place limits on the types and amounts of pollutants that can be discharged. The draft permits set limits for metals, total suspended solids, five-day biochemical oxygen demand, chlorine, ammonia, E. coli, and pH (a measure of acidity) in the wastewater discharged from the facilities.

- The permits allow for a 25 percent by volume "mixing zone" for chlorine and ammonia. This means that 25 percent of the river flow is allowed for dilution of the wastewater. This allows larger amounts of wastewater and higher concentrations of chlorine and ammonia to be discharged than would otherwise be allowed without a mixing zone or with a smaller mixing zone.
- The final permits may also give the WWTPs some time to comply with some of the new water quality-based permit limits. The draft permits do not indicate how long the WWTPs will have to comply, but the final permits will likely provide "compliance schedules" not to exceed five years, as determined by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.
- The permits require that the WWTPs monitor the streams they discharge their wastewater into. This information will be used during the next permit cycle to determine if permit limits are still needed.

Variances Proposed

The draft permits contain proposed variances from water quality criteria for cadmium, lead and zinc for five years from the reissuance date of the permits. While the variances are in effect, the permittees would have to:

- 1) discharge metals at current or lesser levels and not increase the amount of metals in their discharges;
- 2) identify what metals treatment technologies are available; and
- 3) identify and correct the sources of metals entering their collection systems through inflow and infiltration.

What Will the WWTPs Have to Do to Comply With the Permits?

NPDES permits allow each WWTP to design its own way to meet discharge limits. Because the WWTPs don't accept industrial wastewater, the metals in the discharge are likely infiltrating to the collection system from the soil. EPA believes that improvements to the collection systems such as fixing cracks, root intrusion, and preventing inflow of contaminated stormwater through manholes and unauthorized stormwater connections will greatly reduce the amount of metals discharged from the WWTPs. Therefore these activities are required as part of the conditions of issuing variances.

What's an NPDES Permit?

The Clean Water Act requires NPDES permits for all "point sources." By definition, point sources are discrete conveyances such as pipes or man made ditches. Facilities must obtain permits if their wastewater discharges directly to surface waters. Some pollutants in wastewater may threaten public health and the nation's waters. These include: human wastes, toxic chemicals, oil and grease, metals and pesticides.

What's the State's Role?

As part of the NPDES process (section 401 of the Clean Water Act), the state must certify the permit before it is issued or reissued. This means that the state agrees that the permit complies with its water quality standards.

You Can Also Comment on State Certification Decisions

You can review and provide input on IDEQ's preliminary 401 certification on the draft permits by contacting the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Coeur d'Alene Regional Office, c/o David Stasney, 2110 Ironwood Parkway, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814. Public comments must be submitted by October 15, 2002.

After the public comment period, EPA will prepare a response to public comments, make appropriate modifications, and submit the proposed final permits to the state for its final certification.

Where to Review the Permits

The draft NPDES permits and fact sheets can be viewed at the following locations:

EPA Field Office
1910 NW Boulevard
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814
(208) 664-4858

Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality
Coeur d'Alene Regional Office
2110 Ironwood Parkway
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814
(208) 769-1422

Wallace Public Library
415 River Street
Wallace, Idaho 83873
(208) 752-4571

U.S. EPA Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue, OW-130
Seattle, Washington 98101
(206) 553-0253 or (800) 424-4372

The draft permits and fact sheets can also be found on EPA's Region 10 website at:
www.epa.gov/r10earth/water.htm.

Who Can You Call?

For information about the draft permits, contact **Kelly Huynh**, at (206) 553-8414.

For information about the draft variances, contact **Lisa Macchio** at (206) 553-1834.

For general information, contact Marianne Deppman, at 206-553-1237 or toll-free at 1-800-424-4372.



United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 10, ECO-081
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Pre-Sorted Standard
Postage and Fees Paid
U.S. EPA
Permit No. G-35

THREE SILVER VALLEY
WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANTS
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